



# LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTION PARTNERSHIP

ADVANCING JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY SOLUTIONS

121 Mystic Avenue, Suite 9  
Medford, Massachusetts 02155  
T: (781) 393.6985

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June 9, 2021

Re: HB 2196 - Freedom of Information Act; required release of law enforcement disciplinary records

Position: SUPPORT

Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory Council

Dear Advisory Council Members:

As law enforcement in Ohio, we are writing to express our support for HB 2196 in Virginia. We believe that transparency of police misconduct records is benefiting law enforcement in our state and would do the same in Virginia.

In addition to our public safety careers, we are speakers for the Law Enforcement Action Partnership (LEAP). LEAP is a nonprofit group of police, prosecutors, judges, and other criminal justice professionals who speak from firsthand experience. Our mission is to make communities safer by improving police-community relations.

We urge you to support **HB 2196**, which would make police misconduct records open to the public. Currently, Virginia is among a minority of states that allow limited availability to the public. This bill would bring Virginia in line with other states on this issue, such as Ohio, Florida, Colorado, Georgia, and New York. We believe that Ohio's example shows that Virginia can pass this legislation and the sky will not fall.

In fact, we believe that this bill would make Virginia police more effective. Without transparency in policing, the public will not trust us, which makes our job harder. Shining a light on officer misconduct and how it is investigated by departments is a necessary first step towards improving police-community trust in Virginia.

[LawEnforcementActionPartnership.org](http://LawEnforcementActionPartnership.org)

*Formerly known as Law Enforcement Against Prohibition*

Police-community trust is central to public safety. The police are only as strong as our relationships with the public, because we prevent and solve crime based on information from witnesses and victims. A recent report found that more than half of all violent crimes went unreported between 2006 and 2010.<sup>1</sup> To increase crime reporting and information sharing, we need to take action to improve police-community trust.

The trust issue is particularly important in communities of color. Mistrust in the Black community and the killing of George Floyd sparked national protests. Unveiling and examining complaints filed against officers will help to improve cooperation between law enforcement and communities of color.

Finally, opening misconduct records would benefit officers directly. It would allow them to see if disciplinary action is fairly administered throughout their department.

We hope that Ohio can be an example for Virginia in improving police-community trust by making police misconduct records available to the public.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our experience in support of this bill.

Respectfully,

Chief Tom Synan  
Newtown Police Department

Assistant Chief Tom Thompson (Ret.)  
Miamisburg Police Department, OH